

ETC., ETC., ETC., ETC.

BY JACQUELINE SKILES

A couple of years ago I had a fantastic time at the Experimental Television Center in Binghamton, N.Y., learning to use the color video synthesizer, waveform generators, etc., to create original "videoart" tapes and to colorize pre-recorded black and white tapes I'd brought with me. It was my first chance to operate the sophisticated electronic gadgetry necessary to use video as an artistic rather than a primarily documentary medium.

It was an experience that changed my understanding and approach to video. It also changed the direction in which I want to move as an artist. And it was free!

It was free because a few years back, in one of its more enlightened moments, the N.Y. State Council on the Arts decided to fund the center so that artists of the state would have a free facility in which to develop in what is otherwise a seldom affordable medium for most artists, owing to the costs of equipment. Convinced of the value of its original decision, NYSCA has continued to support E.T.C. and the National Endowment for the Arts had added its funds.

On a recent trip upstate I decided to stop by to see what's new at E.T.C. What I saw made me want to go back to work there as soon as possible.

Under the directorship of Ralph Hocking, who is assisted by Sherry Miller and technicians Richard Brewster and David Jones, the Center has grown in scope as well as in facilities. In addition to the color synthesizer devel-

oped a few years ago by video artist Nam June Paik and engineer Walter Abe, the Center now has a new four-channel synthesizer with keys developed by technician Jones, who has also modified the Paik/Abe synthesizer to allow more control over the color it generates.

Stated more simply, in case you're unfamiliar with this technical gobbledygook, the equipment at E.T.C. permits the artist to add synthetic, electronic color of varying hue, value and intensity to prerecorded black and white videotapes. It also permits the transformation of the original scale of grey to black on such tapes to high contrast black and white imagery (which may also be colorized). In conjunction with audio oscillator and generator inputs, cameras, TV signals from broadcast shows, an audio mixing system and other equipment, E.T.C. systems also allow artists to generate their own synthetic forms and images and to simultaneously "paint" them with brilliant electronic color, with endless possibilities for combinations of color and form.

There are currently four artists in residence at the Center: Meryl Blackman, Peer Bode, Michael L.V. Butler and Walter Wright.

According to the Center's brochure, it "supports the development of video as an art form" and encourages "personal explorations of the art." The emphasis is on process; "there is no pressure to produce a finished work," according to Peer Bode.

The Center maintains a free production facility for independent videomak-

ers in the state (the equipment is also available to videomakers from other areas) with technical and instructional help by the Center's staff. Furthermore, groups, especially from local schools, become acquainted with the possibilities of video art through E.T.C.'s workshops. The workshops, often co-sponsored by Binghamton's Roberson Center for the Arts and Sciences, are open to groups of children, teachers and administrators.

The Center also sponsors two internship programs. One encourages students from colleges in the state to spend one or two semesters working at the Center for credit. The other is run in collaboration with Off-Campus College of the State University of New York at Binghamton, also with credit.

There is also increasing collaboration and cooperation with the cinema Department of SUNY-Binghamton, especially since Hocking was recently named head of the department.

In the area of still photography, E.T.C. has offered beginning classes in photography as art and hopes to offer advanced courses as well this year and to sponsor photo exhibitions. There is a free community darkroom at E.T.C.

The Center also sponsors videotape showings, lectures, demonstrations of equipment and performances using video for interested groups and institutions around the state, some in collaboration with Woodstock Com-

munity Video. (I first became acquainted with E.T.C.'s facility through a synthesizer demonstration by Walter Wright at the Kitchen in N.Y. City in 1973.)

The Center maintains a non-circulating library with more than 100 videotapes and numerous books and periodicals on video, film and photography as well as a listing of videotapes available from organizations throughout the country. The library includes materials written by people who work at the Center, such as a basic manual of equipment operation, which is to be supplemented in the near future by a book on the construction of a simple raster manipulation unit and a book dealing with the technological concepts important to video artists.

As part of its program of research and development, the Center hopes to expand its library to increase "the number and kinds of tapes to include more documentary and conceptual works and works produced on various image processing and synthesizing systems."

Artists wishing to use the video production facilities must reserve time well in advance: 4 to 6 weeks are often required. To reserve time or obtain additional information, contact Sherry Miller, Experimental Television Center, Ltd., 164 Court St., Binghamton, N.Y. 13901; (607) 723-9509.

